



Rockford Public Schools Hall of Fame Inductees

2010

Academic/Career

Scott Baldrige, Ph.D.; RHS, 1988 Professor of Mathematics at Louisiana State University

Scott has been influential in research of theoretical mathematics, setting new national standards for math education, and improving school achievement in math. He has written textbooks and won a NSF CAREER award for introducing techniques and methods to construct exotic new examples of four-dimensional spaces.

Erik S. Douglas, Ph.D.; RHS, 1998 Scientist/Bioengineer

Erik developed a cell phone-microscope system for point-of-care diagnosis in resource-limited settings, research which has earned him grants from Intel, Vodafone, and the Gates Foundation. He has conducted research at Oxford, Johns Hopkins, and Stanford, has been granted fellowships from the NSF and United Nations, and holds three patents.

Linda M. Johnston, Ph.D.; RHS, 1970 Associate Professor, Conflict Management, at Kennesaw State University, Atlanta, GA

Linda has done conflict-resolution work worldwide, including the Ukraine, Republic of Georgia, Barbados, Nigeria, Egypt, and The United States. She is the director of several conflict-management programs, and her research interests include racial and ethnic conflict, narrative and discourse theory and world view theory.

Michael D. Lepech, Ph.D.; RHS, 1997 Assistant Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Stanford University

Mike's teaching and research focuses on the creation of new building materials for green infrastructure systems, and he is currently involved in creating a new construction material known as Engineered Cementitious Composite (ECC). He is a senior fellow at Stanford's Center for Sustainable Development and Global Competitiveness.

J. Brett Grill; RHS, 1997 Assistant Professor in the Department of Art at the University of Missouri

Brett was selected by the Gerald R. Ford Foundation to produce the bronze, full-body sculpture of the late President Ford. The sculpture will be displayed at the National Statuary Collection in Washington, D.C.

Honorary Achievement

Carole Baker

Carole is a Rockford community member who has been involved with Rockford Schools since the 1960s. As an employee (26 years), she worked mainly with children with special needs, and most-specifically with blind students; she even learned Braille! She has been the varsity cheerleading advisor and continues to serve in the schools as a volunteer in a variety of capacities.

Linda Blackmore

Linda is the director of Rockford's Odyssey of the Mind program. She has coached numerous teams over the years, beginning with her own child's team. Throughout the years, Linda has enriched the lives of countless students through OM by helping them become out-of-the-box thinkers and by putting kids first.

Dr. Michael Shibler

During Dr. Shibler's tenure as superintendent of schools, all RPS buildings have received North Central Accreditation, and eleven buildings have been named Blue Ribbon Schools. Dr. Shibler is recognized as a leader among superintendents statewide as he continues to lead the fight for equitable school funding throughout the State of Michigan.

Service to Rockford Public Schools/Community

Clarence Blakeslee (Deceased); RHS, 1932

Clarence served in some of the most intense battles of WWII and was recognized for his heroism. Upon returning to Rockford, he served the community for the rest of his 95 years as a business leader, city councilman, mayor, county commissioner, and as a continual and energetic volunteer in every aspect of Rockford Community life until his death in 2010.

Neil Blakeslee; RHS, 1966

Neil is a former city councilman and two-term mayor. While on the City Council he was instrumental in the overall redevelopment of downtown Rockford's streetscape and riverfront development projects. He has served in leadership roles in numerous civic organizations, church, and youth activities, including mentoring RHS students.

2012

Academic & Career Accomplishment

Ginger Zuidgeest; RHS, 1999, Meteorologist, Good Morning America

Ginger, whose career as a meteorologist began locally at WOOD-TV, had a goal when she graduated Rockford High School: To be a meteorologist on the Today Show by age 30. (Grand Rapids Press, February 26, 2010.) Known professionally as Ginger Zee, she moved quickly from Grand Rapids to Chicago's NBC affiliate WMAQ-TV, and also filled-in on the Today Show. She is now a meteorologist on ABC's Good Morning America.

Matthew Turk, Ph.D.; RHS 1999, Astrophysicist

Matthew is known for his groundbreaking research demonstrating that “first stars” could have been double stars. He received his Ph.D. from Stanford and was a member of the Kavli Institute for Particle Astrophysics and Cosmology. Currently, Matthew is a National Science Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow in the Cyber Infrastructure for Transformative Computational Science program at Columbia University.

Cultural & Performing Arts

Cameron Warne; RHS 2001, Violinist and Songwriter

He is a graduate of the Peabody Institute of Music in violin performance, has performed in many notable venues in the United States, including the Lincoln Center in New York City, as well as in Europe. Known professionally as Cameron Blake, he has released four albums of original songs and has been featured in The Washington Times, Baltimore City Paper and on Maryland’s NPR station where reviewers have described his music and lyrics as “refreshingly poetic,” “evocative” and “profound.”

Honorary Achievement

Robert S. Boyer

Bob began teaching in Rockford in 1949, and over the course of thirty years, served as a class advisor, tennis coach, and junior high principal in the building that is now the Administration Building. He was instrumental in building the new junior high, which is now the Freshman Center. He has tutored students through Rotary and the Methodist Church.

Jacquelyn Melin

Jacque was a teacher and principal who created the first Gifted and Talented program for Rockford Public Schools. She was a pioneer in identifying students with out-of-grade-level testing and helped bring the Odyssey of the Mind program to Rockford. She created both Saturday and Summer Enrichment Programs for students and used a \$10,000 grant from Toyota to convert an old school bus into a science lab on wheels. Jacque was the first to introduce Differentiation to teachers, a strategy necessary for meeting a variety of learning styles in the classroom.

Carol Muth

Carol founded the Rockford Education Foundation in 1991 after serving on the Rockford Public Schools Board of Education. For the next 10 years she served as a volunteer on the REF Board, either in the capacity of Chairperson or Executive Director. In those 10 years, Carol was instrumental in building the organization’s endowment fund to a substantial and sustainable, \$496,000.

Service to Rockford Public Schools & Community

Victor Krause; RHS 1953

Former member House of Representatives, State of Michigan Vic, who served four terms in the State House of Representatives in the 1980s, is credited with making a significant impact on public policy. A veteran of the United States Navy, he has served our community as a member of numerous boards and committees, including the Rockford Education Foundation from 1991-1994. His deep interest in the American Cancer

Society led him to sell his company, Krause Travel, Inc., in 1976 to join the American Cancer Society as Vice President.

2014

Academic & Career Accomplishment

Zachory Berta-Thompson; RHS 2003

He went on to earn an A.B. in Astrophysical Sciences from Princeton University in 2007 and a Ph.D. in Astronomy from Harvard University in 2013. Zach started working in astronomy in college where he mapped out the three-dimensional locations of the biggest structures in the Universe – massive clusters of galaxies – using two-dimensional color images from the Sloan Digital Sky Survey. Some of the clusters found with his method had never been seen before. Zach focused his graduate thesis on looking for much smaller astronomical objects: Earth-like planets around other stars. Working with a team led by Professor David Charbonneau at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, Zach used the MEarth Observatory in Arizona to search for these planets. He discovered the extrasolar planet GJ1214b, a strange world that is unlike any planet in our Solar System. Before graduating, Zach used the Hubble Space Telescope to study the atmosphere of GJ1214b, which is now one of the most closely studied extrasolar planets. Currently, as the Torres Fellow for Exoplanetary Research at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Zach continues to investigate super-Earth and sub-Neptune planets like GJ1214b. He is still searching for more small exoplanets and working on the team developing the Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite, a new NASA mission.

Michael Zevalkink; RHS 1967

He received his BSE and MSE in Mechanical Engineering at The University of Michigan. He joined Ford Motor Company in 1972. Beginning as a design engineer, Mike's career culminated as the Executive Director of Ford's Performance Group, which included Motorsports, Vehicle Personalization and Performance Car Programs. During his 33-year career at Ford, his positions included being the Executive Director for the Ford Specialty Vehicle Team (Mustang, Cobra, and F-150 Lightning Programs), and the first Ford Production Super Car, the Ford GT. He was the Vehicle Line Executive Director for all Ford branded regular production cars, MVPs, and Vans sold in the United States, and he was the Vehicle Line Director for the Lincoln, Mercury, and Ford Large and Luxury Cars. Other Senior Management positions held at Ford include the first fully homologated Mustang Vehicle Program into Japan, and first joint ventures with Mazda and Nissan. In 1993, Mike was highlighted in Automotive News as the Chief Program Engineer of the 1994 SN-95 Mustang Program. This program brought back a re-designed Mustang for its thirtieth anniversary. This 1995 Mustang was awarded "Car of the Year" by Motor Trend Magazine.

Cultural & Performing Arts

Dana Mambourg Zimbric; RHS 1996

She received her Bachelor of Music in Clarinet Performance from The University of Wisconsin, and Master of Music in Orchestral Conducting from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Currently, she is the Artistic Director and Conductor of The California Chamber Orchestra in Temecula, CA. A champion of music education, Dana serves as the Senior Director of Music & Programs for Classics 4 Kids and Conductor of the Classics Philharmonic Orchestra, a position she has held since 2003. Dana was the Associate Conductor for

Orchestra Nova (formerly the San Diego Chamber Orchestra) from 2010-2013. As guest conductor, she has led the San Diego State University Symphony Orchestra and various Honor Orchestras for the San Diego Unified School District. Previous conducting positions include the San Diego Youth Symphony, Avanti (Youth) Chamber Orchestra, and the University of Wisconsin Chamber and Symphony Orchestras. Through her continued professional training, Dana has conducted orchestras in New York, Chicago, Milwaukee, Ann Arbor, Norwalk, Santa Cruz and Puerto Rico.

April Soderstrom; RHS 2002

She graduated from Central Michigan University with a degree in Interior Design. After college, she specialized in hospitality design, designing restaurants for local celebrity chefs. After designing vacation homes on Martha's Vineyard and the British Virgin Island of Tortola for hotel developer Richard Friedman, she began working full time with his company in 2009. In 2011, April officially launched April Soderstrom Jewelry. Her detail work, passion for color, and mixing of materials show through in many of her designs. She's been named the "Bay State Glitterati" by the Boston Herald, and dubbed the "Mix Master" by the Boston Common Magazine. In 2010, she started a special collection tailored to designing one-of-a-kind jewelry for pageant contestants. April's jewelry has been featured on many television shows (The Bachelorette, The Katie Couric TV Show) and in many national magazines (Seventeen, Real Simple, People, StyleWatch, and the cover of Fitness), to name a few.

Honorary Achievement

Jamie Hosford

James Jay "Jamie" Hosford was dedicated to his profession and compassionate towards others. During his tenure in Rockford Public Schools, he served as Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources from 1994-2013 and as the Assistant Principal and Principal of Rockford Middle School (1986-1994). He was instrumental in leading the transition from a junior high to middle school, responsible for Rockford Middle School gaining National Exemplary School Status, and redefined the entire hiring and evaluation process for Rockford Public School Employees. He was also named Middle School Principal of the Year by the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals. Jamie served the community in the Lions Club, and as the coordinator of the Year of the Ram Community Art Project. As the most decorated athlete ever at Grand Valley State University. He was inducted into the Grand Rapids Sports Hall of Fame, recipient of the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) Award, named Grand Valley State University's Distinguished Alumni, and was the first living male inducted into Grand Valley State University's Athletic Hall of Fame.

Fred Reusch

After graduating from Northwestern University in 1970 with a Masters Degree, Fred went to work as an Operations Research Analyst in Exxon in Math/Computers/Systems Department. Fred left to follow his calling to be a math teacher, a decision he has never regretted. He completed his education coursework at Aquinas College, student taught in Rockford, and obtained a position at the middle school in 1989. In 1999-2000, Fred started teaching Advanced Placement Calculus classes at Rockford High School. Since then, the success of his students has been noteworthy, outscoring students from across the state on AP Calculus AB and AP Calculus BC exams. Mr. Reusch continuously searches for ways to keep the classroom environment exciting so students want to learn the material. Most notably, when he is teaching derivatives, he comes to school dressed in a mask and cape as "Captain Derivative," a superhero created by him, and teaches in character all day. In addition to calculus, Fred encourages his students to be their best in all

aspects of life. Former students still recall how he took the time to get to know them outside of the classroom by attending sporting events, plays, concerts, and musicals.

Susan Bodenner

As the owner of Bishop Hills Elder Care Community, along with husband Jim, Susan strives to enhance learning & literacy skills while improving the quality of life for their residents through several intergenerational reading programs. She is an active member of the Rockford Rotary Club which is also very involved in literacy development in the community. Susan was the co-founder of Reading Rocks in Rockford, which earned the International Rotary/International Reading Association Pearson Foundation Award. She coordinated RHS Students to participate in the Healing Field of 2011 at Cannonsburg Ski Hill. Following 9/11, Susan worked with Geri Curtis/RHS-TV to create a community video message for deployed military. This involved every Rockford school and the resulting video was distributed by Rep. Vern Ehlers to every deployed ship for Christmas, 2001. Since 2001, Susan and her husband have been champions of the Biosand water filter and the need for safe drinking water for third world countries. They have worked on many facets of this project and have involved area high school students.

Sue Jo Bakita

After being a member of The Future Teachers of America club at Elsie High School in the 1950s, Sue went on to pursue that dream at Central Michigan University and was hired in 1963 to teach in Rockford. Sue was well regarded by her students and the RPS Staff. Additionally, she served on numerous committees including the committee to design the new middle school, the Curriculum Council for Rockford Public Schools, the Gifted/Talented Advisory Committee, and the North Central Outcomes Accreditation Team, was a member and former leader of a Building Improvement Team, and was chair of the Department of Social Studies and Special Education for Rockford Middle School. Sue also hosted, attended, and presented at the Michigan Association of Middle School Educators (MAMSE) conferences, and in 1991-1992, she was selected by that organization as Teacher of the Year. In Rockford, Sue has been recognized as an exemplary educator by earning the Outstanding Secondary Teacher of the Year (1991-1992) and the Outstanding Junior High Teacher in 1977. In 1992, Sue was selected for inclusion in Who's Who Among America's Teachers. Sue's fifty-year career with Rockford Public Schools culminated in June, 2014 with her retirement.

Service to Rockford Public Schools & Overall Community

Derek VanDam; RHS 2001

He attained celebrity status in South Africa as Chief Meteorologist on the eNews Channel Africa (eNCA). He is also known for his service to the greater African community through his work with The Compassionate Life Foundation (CLF) which focuses on vulnerable children and widows who have been affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. After receiving his Bachelor of Science in Meteorology and Bachelor of Fine Arts in Broadcast and Cinematic Arts from Central Michigan University, Derek worked at a TV station in Flint when an opportunity arose, through his church, to participate in a mission trip to Swaziland with CLF. After the mission work, Derek went to Cape Town, South Africa where he had a chance meeting with the news director of a TV station who mentioned that they were about to launch South Africa's first 24-hour news and weather channel. Derek was offered the top meteorology position there. Derek is credited with raising the quality and standards of weather broadcasting across Africa; he oversees a team of seven meteorologists and anchors daily weather bulletins for the station's flagship news shows. He has earned the distinction of Certified Broadcast Meteorologist from the American Meteorological Society, and from CMU he has been awarded

“The Outstanding Young Alumni” and the “Top Ten Under Ten” awards. Most recently, Derek has accepted a meteorologist position with CNN International.

Honorary Achievement

Kathy Munger

She started teaching in Rockford Public Schools in 1992 and retired after a 24-year career at RPS. She was the co-creator of the Rockford Reading Festival reading. She also created and sought funding for the Hillview Learning Center where volunteers spend time weekly, over the summer, playing learning games with the students who live in the Hillview community. Kathy has been awarded the Rockford Chamber Of Commerce Mentor Award, RPS Teacher of the Year, Rockford Rotary’s Paul Harris Award, the Kent Reading Council Golden Apple Award, and the International Rotary/International Reading Association Pearson Award.

Service to Rockford Public Schools & Overall Community

Peter Kruer; RHS 1972

He epitomizes the word humble, and to Rockford residents is as iconic as the business he started in 1983, Rockford Ace Hardware. He made it a point to be involved in the community. He was active in his church and served on committees in many Rockford organizations, such as the North Kent Service Center, the Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary. He hosts the Antique Tractor Show, has a huge pumpkin patch, shares his knowledge of barbecue, and is a Master Gardener with expertise in trees. Kruer has impacted his community in a positive way and makes Rockford a richer community.

2018

Academic & Career Accomplishment

Trillium Hibbeln; RHS 1990

She earned her bachelor’s degree from James Madison College at Michigan State University in International Relations. After her undergraduate studies, she supervised a federally grant-funded AmeriCorps Vista program in Atlanta, GA that focused on helping refugee families transition to their new home. In 1996 she and her husband relocated to Bangkok, Thailand to work as teachers. From Bangkok, they moved to Asunción, Paraguay where she taught middle school. She earned her Master’s in Education in 2005. Trillium returned to Michigan after the birth of her son. After the birth of her daughter, who was born with a serious medical condition, she began writing grants in the health care field. She was hired to write a federal grant to the Department of Education on behalf of Rockford Public Schools to start the Rockford Spanish Immersion Program at Roguewood Elementary and the Chinese language program at the high school. She has held the position of Grant Writer and eventually Grants Director for the Spectrum Health Foundation. In 2007 she was appointed Director of Program Development for Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital, overseeing the operational planning for the new hospital in 2011. In 2009 she co-founded The Power of Education Foundation (www.powerofeducationfoundation.org), a non-profit organization dedicated to elevating illiteracy and reducing poverty among some of Haiti’s poorest children. The organization works with schools, including several RPS classes, to help American children connect with the issues of educational equity in Haiti. In 2016, she became an International Accreditation Leader for the Commission on International Education, the

international arm of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) serving schools in 70 countries. In 2017, she and her family moved to Shanghai, China where she continues to support and evaluate schools in the Asia Pacific region, Europe and the Middle East as the Associate Director for NEASC, along with continuing her work with The Power of Education Foundation from her home in Shanghai.

Cultural & Performing Arts

Brian Morris; RHS 1974

Brian is currently in his twentieth-fourth year as a member of the GRCC Music Faculty. Brian is the Director of the GRCC International Guitar Series and has been a concert organizer for over twenty-five years. He was the Director of the 2010 Mid-America Guitar Ensemble Festival and a faculty member and ensemble director for the Interlochen Summer Guitar Workshops. He is the author of *The Real Guitar Method* and has recorded four CD's. Brian has performed with the West Shore Symphony, the Grand Rapids Symphony, at the College Music Society's Regional Conference in Madison, WI, the Kennedy Center, and has twice been featured as a presenter at the Kellogg Institute for International Studies on the campus of Notre Dame University.

Honorary Achievement

Randy Sellhorn

Randy began his service as a Trustee of the Rockford Board of Education in 1995. During Randy's 21 years on the Board of Education, he helped implement many programs and advancements throughout the Rockford educational community. His support for many bond issues and millages led to numerous district improvements, including expansion of recreational opportunities that provided 30 additional outdoor fields for district and community use, construction of four new school buildings, district security enhancements, and converting Sheridan Trails to the Freshman Center. Randy retired from Foremost Insurance after 35 years.

Service to Rockford Public Schools & Overall Community

David Nagy; RHS 1997

David holds a Master of Science degree in Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering from the University of Michigan and a Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering from Grand Valley State University. David works in the office of the Director, Undersea Warfare (N97) as a Technical Advisor for future submarine design and technology, as well as the Tactical Submarine Evolution Plan. He began his career in the civil service at the Naval Surface Warfare Center Carderock Division where he supervised advanced submarine concept designs and future submarine technology.